Graduate Students Forum - Lent Term Minutes

April 30th 2012

Attending: Daniel Bates [DB] (CompArch), Omar Choudary [OC] (Security), Lise Gough [LG], Colin Kelly [CK] (NLIP), Steffen Loesch [SL] (PLS, Theory), Marwa Mahmoud [MM] (Rainbow), Dominic Orchard [DO] (PLS, CPRG), Sören Preibusch [SP] (DTG), Andy Rice [AR], Malte Schwarzkopf [MS] (SRG)
Secretary: Dominic Orchard [DO]

1 Apologies

Danish Contractor (MPhil) and Andra Adams (Rainbow) (with Marwa Mahmoud kindly standing in for Andra).

2 To discuss

1. Update on the table football - SL

   SL managed to get in contact with the person who had lent the previous table to the lab. Based on these discussion and his own research SL presented three options to the forum:

   (a) An identical table, approximately £1000, with UK suppliers;
   (b) A slightly different table, with one UK supplier but unavailable until June;
   (c) A higher quality table at approximately £1500.

   SP suggested that a second-hand table could be an alternative but all agreed that this would take longer to acquire, may be less durable, and that we have adequate allocated funds anyway.

   All were in favour of going ahead with buying a table as soon as possible.

   Action: SL to get quotes and talk to Louis from stores who can be given the relevant grant code once a table has been selected.

2. Kitchen Utilities - DB

   It has been noted that some of the kitchens in the lab are under supplied; for example, there are now only two microwaves in the whole lab and no working tin openers in the fishbowl kitchen.

   DB raised the question of purchasing a new microwave for the fishbowl kitchen. Previously building services have had qualms about microwaves on grounds of safety and food smells. All agreed that the new five-minute operation plugs used for the other two microwaves in the lab limit the safety risks and that the fishbowl is sufficiently far from any offices that anti-social food smells are not a problem.

   It was also raised in discussion that it would be nice to use the lab's BBQ, but AR noted this first requires training in food safety.

   Action: DB to talk to building services about microwaves (since the meeting a new microwave has appeared in the fishbowl kitchen). DB to take an inventory of the kitchen facilities (tin openers, knives, tea spoons, mugs, etc.). All: recruit two PhD students willing to be trained in food safety (for which AR has also volunteered).

3. PhD pizza lunches - MS

   MS has agreed to organise the first of the informal, lunchtime PhD talks sometime in May/June. He has volunteered to give the first talk himself to set the tone for future events. AR suggested CherryBox pizza after good experiences from previous events.

   It was suggested that another good social event could be to watch the new PhD comics movie. Using a lecture hall after hours requires a member of staff to stay to lock-up and turn-off the lights.

   Action: MS to continue with the organisation of the PhD lunch and to investigate the possibility of screening the PhD comics movie.

4. Day out for Grad Students - OC

   OC proposed an outing for graduate students, for example to the "Go Ape" activity-centre near to Cambridge.

   The forum was in agreement that this would be a good idea as both a social, bonding, and communication exercise. AR and LG noted that a coach can be hired to take people from Cambridge and that the outing could be paid for out of the forum's budget (which expires at the end of July). Go Ape costs approximately £12-15 per person. Staff would be able to attend as well if the staff-student ratio is at most 1:8.

   Monday 9th of July was suggested as a good date as it is after the lab open days, after the degree committee, before summer holidays (hence less busy due to the lack of children), and far enough in the future for planning.

It was suggested that Robert Mullins might be a useful source of advice for organising such a trip as he previously organised a trip to Bletchley Park. Since this trip was very enjoyable it was suggested that it could be repeated in the future.

Action: OC to get a quote from Go Ape.

3   Departmental announcements

1. PRES Results - LG

   The Graduate Education Committee (GEC) has discussed the PRES results and subsequently discussed further reviewing PhD supervision. Currently a (thorough) survey on college experiences is being compiled which will be distributed to students once approved by the GEC.

2. Transferable Skills budget - AR

   AR updated the forum on the status of the Transferable Skills (TS) budget, for which money from outside the university will be ceasing on the 31st of July. After this date the university will be funding transferable skills out of its own fund (the "Research and Development framework"). The School of Technology will have a budget of approximately £90,000, which will be roughly half the previous budget and with a widening in scope. In the new system, funding will be allocated by assessing needs-based bids, instead of local decisions on allocation of funds. Currently the TS budget helps to support activities which would be difficult to successfully bid for in the future. The languages courses, which are currently one of the principle uses of the TS budget for the lab, should be easier to justify to the university.

4   Student feedback

- [Theory] - SL - Nothing to report.

- [CPRG] - DO - Nothing to report.

- [Security] - OC - A member of the security group has asked why money has been spent on cameras but there is not money for other things? The answer is that the cameras were bought out of money allocated for skills development– which cannot be transferred for other uses.

  This question prompted discussion on the use of the cameras and of mentoring between students.

  AR encouraged the groups to use the cameras to record the MPhil practice talks for the MPhil students affiliated to a group by their

supervisor. In the SRG the Part II project talks were recorded previously but never disseminated (editing was first required). AR noted the possibility of having a dedicated server to store recorded talks (the filer does not have enough space for this).

The forum discussed the possibility of training PhD students in reviewing MPhil presentations and providing structured feedback to the students. AR offered to provide such a training session, perhaps for first year PhD students so that they can apply their training in their second year. Some had qualms that PhD students would not use the skill enough times to make it useful, but many agreed it would be a useful skill to attain.

MS noted that in other faculties it seems more common for older PhD students to help younger students in a mentoring-like role, but the culture in the lab seems more individualistic. It is hoped that the PhD lunches will help to remedy this situation. LG pointed out that women@CL has a big-sister-little-sister scheme which provides support of this nature, at least at the beginning of a student's research. OC noted that corporations often have mentoring schemes (for example at Google). AR recommended trying such mentoring from the bottom-up in groups and seeing if it can be widened given some experience and feedback.

- [DTG] - SP - Nothing to report.
- [SRG] - MS - None.
- [NLIP] - CK - None.
- [Rainbow] - MM - None.
- [CompArch] - DB - None.

5   Any other business

1. Alternate uses of forum budget - OC

   OC raised a few items he had noted that could be purchased with the forum's budget, which were then discussed, including: basketball hoops (either outdoor or indoor), table tennis (which would require adequate space; a good proposal for location is needed), guitar (too loud), games console (problem with open access if in the downstairs common room, trying to find space where it will not be a disturbance is difficult),

   AR encouraged making the computer lab more desirable for undergraduate and graduate students. As of yet, no new ideas have been agreed upon.

2. PhD poster competition - AR

   It was suggested to AR that the PhD poster competition could be co-located with distinguished Wednesday seminars taking place this year. AR to pursue this.

3. New Secretary

   DO will be finishing his PhD soon, thus a new secretary for the forum will need to be allocated.

6   Next meeting

End of June.